

# **Report of the Special Committee on Youth Violent Crime Prevention: Working Together to Increase the Peace**



Report to City Council President Michael F. Flaherty and  
Members of the Boston City Council

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Members of the Special Committee:

Councilor Michael P. Ross, Chair  
Councilor Felix D. Arroyo, Vice-Chair  
Councilor Maureen E. Feeney  
Councilor Stephen J. Murphy  
Councilor Chuck Turner

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Presented for the Committee by Michael P. Ross, Chair

# Report of the Special Committee on Youth Violent Crime Prevention:

## Working Together to Increase the Peace

### INTRODUCTION

On January 25, 2006, City Council President Michael Flaherty created the Special Committee on Youth Violent Crime Prevention to address the rise in violent crime among youth in the City of Boston. The committee is composed of five Councilors: Michael Ross (chairman), Felix Arroyo, Maureen Feeney, Stephen Murphy, and Chuck Turner. The committee is directed to investigate the current rise in gang and youth crime in the City of Boston, examine existing city programs designed to deal with such issues, review suggestions for future policy and programs, and formulate a series of recommendations on this matter for the Boston City Council.

To date the committee has held two public hearings, four community forums, and over 75 hours of interviews with elected officials, clergy members, youth, community leaders, administration officials, and others.

On February 22, 2006, the committee held its first public hearing convening youth and youth workers to discuss the increase in youth violence. Over 150 youth

attended the public hearing and many testified as to what they felt the city should do to stem the violence. On March 27, 2006, a second hearing was held to discuss the issue of school violence.

Four community forums were held in late May in Jamaica Plain, Codman Square, Roxbury and South Boston. These forums were attended by over 200 youth, youth workers and neighborhood leaders, as well as members of the community and elected officials. At each forum participants were asked to fill out surveys and rank the recommendations by category. They are identified in this report by the following symbols:



**This recommendation received the greatest number of first choice votes from those participants in attendance**



**This recommendation received the second greatest number of first choice votes from those participants in attendance**

The committee used this data along with other information collected since its inception to identify a series of recommendations that are summarized within this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, with 75 murders, Boston experienced its deadliest year in a decade. A closer look behind the numbers revealed young people were the primary target of the shootings.

This report examines recent shooting data and makes specific recommendations based on input from those who are closest to the violence.

### WHY THE INCREASE IN VIOLENCE?

In 2005 high school aged youth totaled 25,837. In 2006 the number increases by 250, reaching its highest level in over a decade. This number is significant when one considers that of the shootings that took place in 2005, fifty percent of the victims were high school age.

This increase of the youth population comes at a time of severe federal and state budget cuts. State local aid and targeted federal programs comprise nearly \$85 million in cuts since 2001.

As a result, initiatives that make a difference, such as increased police on the streets and summer jobs suffer. These programs have an immediate impact in our communities. When combined with other challenges such as cuts to ex-offender programs and other social programs, the problem only increases.

### VIOLENCE DATA

The majority of the 2005 shootings, where the victims were twenty-one years and younger, were concentrated in specific regions of

the city. Shootings took place during the warmer months, typically on the weekend and later into the evening and early morning. During the school year, the violence was all but absent during the hours high school was in session, and increased significantly after dismissal.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the budgetary challenges, Boston must strategically realign its resources by promoting those programs and initiatives that have the greatest impact on youth violence.

- Increase summer jobs and stipends to meet the increase of the growing youth population
- Focus equal resources on at-risk youth who are presently unaffiliated with existing programs as well as adjudicated youth
- Expand existing resources to serve youth when violence is most likely to occur, such as weekends and evening hours
- Hire additional police officers
- Improve relationships between police youth and their families through dialogue
- Increase sports and arts programs in schools
- Start and end high schools later to reduce violence further into the day
- More trauma training for those who work with the youth such as street workers and teachers

### IMPLEMENTATION

The current increase of the youth population requires the immediate

funding of youth serving resources. The high school aged population will go from its highest point in over a decade in 2006 to one of its lowest in 2011. Budgetary reserves should be made available as part of the fiscal year 2007, 2008 and 2009 budgets to handle the spike in at-risk youth. The use of reserves for these purposes is ideal in that it represent onetime, not recurring, costs.

## WHY THE INCREASE IN VIOLENCE?

It has been more than fifteen years since Boston has seen more than 500 shootings in a single year when the city's violent crime was at an all time high. If shootings remain at the current rate, in 2006 we are on pace to reach over 600 shootings, higher than any year during the nineties, the period of unprecedented gang violence that preceded what was called "The Boston Miracle."

### **Youth comprise fifty percent of the victims of gun violence**

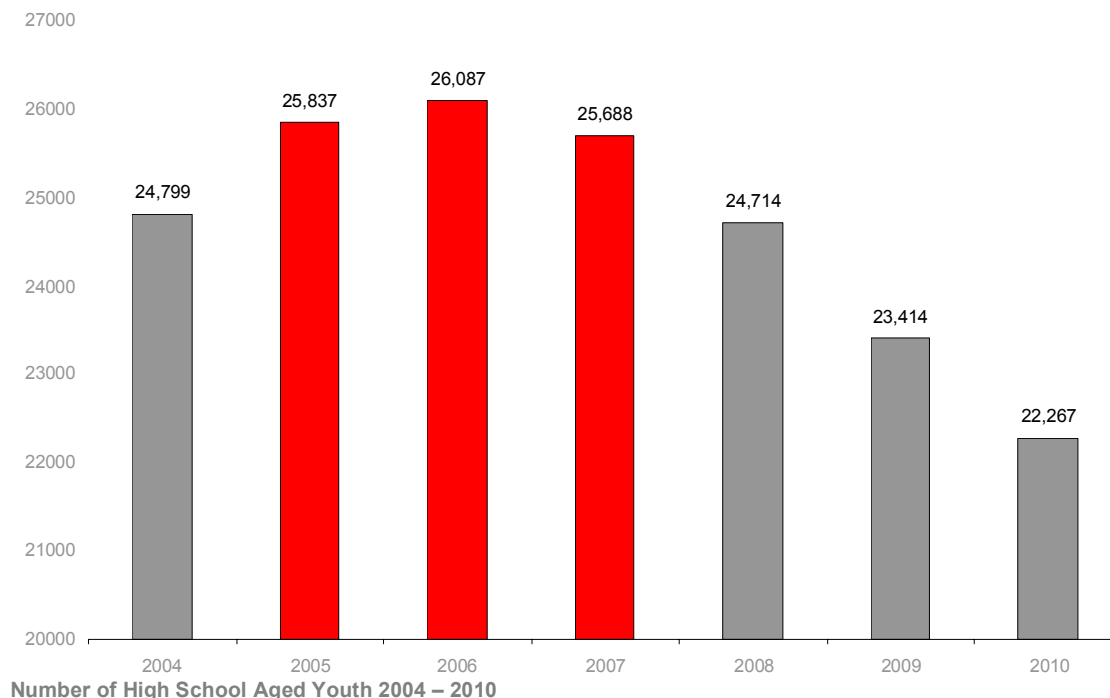
Young people by definition are "at risk," because they represent the largest age cohort of victims of gun violence. Of the 341 shootings that took place in 2005, fifty percent of the victims were between the ages of fourteen to twenty-one.

### **Between 2005 and 2007, high school-aged youth population numbers were at their highest numbers in decades**

Given that young people as an age group comprise the greatest number of victims, the current demographic peak contributes to the total increase in violence, and calls for immediate resources.

This presents both a challenge and an asset. It is a challenge because the growth in the youth population requires a considerable monetary investment at a time of drastic budgetary cuts and increased costs. It is an asset, as will be discussed below in the implementation section, because the additional youth population represents a onetime non recurring cost for a finite period of time. While recurring costs represent a net increase to all future budgets,

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onetime expenditures do not. Given that the demographics for high school-aged youth will ultimately level off to a lower, more manageable number; it is clear that the time to act is now, when the numbers of at-risk youth are greatest.

### Federal and state budget cuts

Beginning in 1993, cities including Boston saw the greatest increase in federal funding for programs that went to the heart of urban violence. For example, in the early nineties the COPS initiative funded 100 police officers on Boston streets for three years in a row.

Beginning in 2001, Boston saw yearly reductions of targeted youth violence prevention resources from the federal government. Boston lost \$2.5 million in public safety grants,<sup>1</sup> \$3.0 million in local law enforcement block grants,<sup>2</sup> hundreds of thousands of dollars in community block grants<sup>3</sup> and alternative education grants,<sup>4</sup> and most recently lost \$4.5 million in Youth Opportunity Grants.<sup>5</sup> In total, during the last several years the federal government cut over \$8.6 million in cuts to targeted programs that deal squarely with the issue of youth violence, precisely at the time when high school aged youth were at their highest. This number excludes cuts in other areas such as education and housing.

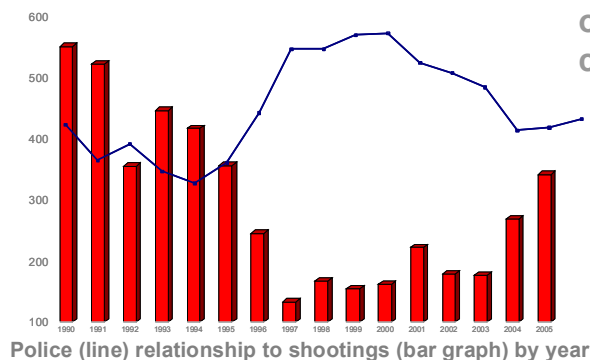
In fiscal year 2003, Boston saw a significant reduction in state aid, its second largest revenue source after property taxes. Four years later, Boston received \$75.6 million *less* in net state aid than it had received in 2002.

These are seismic cuts to Boston's \$2.125 billion budget. Such cuts affect large ticket items such as hiring additional police officers and providing summer jobs for youth, particularly now, when the number of youth eligible for these positions is the highest it has been in over a decade.

### Police on the street

The number of police on the street is crucial to the real and perceived safety in our communities. There is a causal relationship between police on our streets and the number of shootings in our community: more police, less shootings.

There is a causal relationship between police on our streets and the number of shootings in our community.



With the Mayor's recent announcement of doubling the police classes for the fiscal year 2007 budget providing for an increase of an additional 140 new officers, as well as the transfer of municipal officers the total number of sworn officers will be 2,170.

Of course, it is not just the number of police on the streets that is important, but also the relationships that the police share with members of the community. At the community forums, the topic of strained police

and youth relationships came up frequently.

### **Summer jobs**

There is also an inverse correlation between the number of funded summer jobs and the number of shootings. Simply stated, there is a causal relationship between summer jobs and safer streets.



For example, in 2002, when state aid was considerably higher, there were 5,572 summer jobs and shootings were among their lowest levels.

The fiscal year 2007 budget includes \$3.6 million in non-personnel funding for summer jobs which would provide for 3,300 jobs. In addition, the administration continues to aggressively fundraise and work with its partners, Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), and the Summer Jobs Taskforce. Despite these efforts thousands of young people will not have a job this summer.

### **Other factors contributing to the increase in violence**

#### **>>Reintegration of past offenders**

Every month, 300 former offenders are returned to Boston streets with very few reintegration programs.

While recidivism rates in the eighties were as low as twenty-eight percent, today they are over 60 percent. State programs such as job training and drug treatment in prisons have been significantly cut.

In addition, barriers to employment for ex-offenders prevent employment even in some of the most entry-level positions. Fast food restaurants such as McDonalds and Dunkin Donuts, for example, routinely screen out job applicants with criminal records. Criminal offender record checks (CORI) reform, an issue that the Boston City Council and the Mayor have strongly supported, is also needed at the state and federal level. Otherwise, reintegration becomes almost impossible, resulting in a burden that all of society must bear.

#### **>>Past success**

In many ways, past success has contributed to the increase in violence that is here today. It took a tremendous effort for the community to pull together in the nineties to reach the record level lows of violence achieved in Boston. For those who were on the front lines of the “Boston Miracle,” there was no miracle, but rather a lot of hard work.

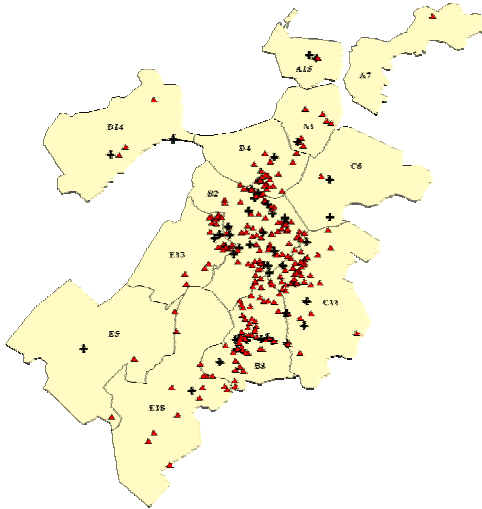
Following the success of crime reduction in the nineties, Boston’s attention was pulled in a number of directions, first the housing crisis, then the budget crisis.

Refocusing the complex partnership of government, the judicial system, and community and business leaders requires a renewed effort, particularly when many of the participants have changed.

## VIOLENCE DATA (2005)

### Where does the violence occur?

In 2005, 71 percent of all shootings occurred in the police districts B2, B3, and C11: parts of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan.



Shootings, fatal and nonfatal, 2005

Violence is not limited to shootings in certain neighborhoods. Different communities manifest violence in different ways. Not shown on the above map are the hundreds of young people who are inflicting violence on themselves through drug abuse and overdoses. During the same year, 146 people died of drug overdoses in Boston.

### When does the violence occur?

A majority of the shootings, 59 percent, of those victims twenty-one years and younger occurred during the warmer months, between June and October.

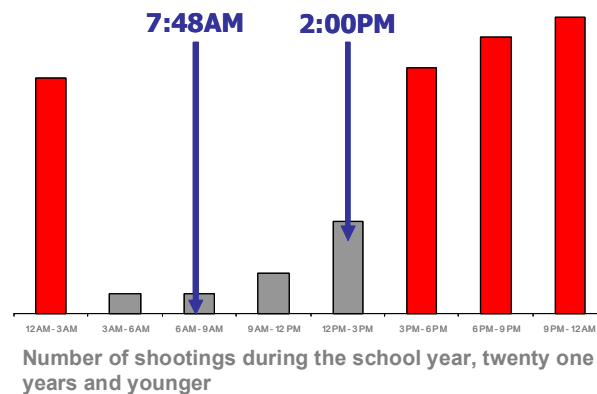
Specifically, Saturday was the most dangerous day of the week,

accounting for twenty-five percent of the shootings of victims twenty-one years and younger. Together, Saturdays and Sundays comprised 40 percent of the shootings in a given week. Nearly one third of the shootings occurred between the hours of 9:00PM to midnight.

### During the school year

Given that the average starting time for high school is 7:48AM,<sup>6</sup> with a majority beginning at 7:20AM, more than half of the high schools are dismissed before 2:00PM. Almost half of a group of high school students recently interviewed said they choose to “hang out with their friends,” or “go home alone”<sup>7</sup> after school. For those young people, this leaves a considerable amount of unstructured and unsupervised time after 3PM. During the school year, 86 percent of shootings occur between 3PM and 3AM for victims twenty one years and younger.

**Saturday was the most dangerous day of the week, accounting for twenty-five percent of the shootings of victims twenty one years and younger.**





## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations represent a collection of ideas culled from Boston area youth, youth workers, and those who work with young people including community organizers, clergy, and elected officials. By no means is this a complete list. Rather, it represents a consistent message presented by people across the city.

Whatever recommendations are implemented, there must be a balanced approach in identifying those resources that reach young people who are already affiliated with Boston's many programs and resources, and those youth that remain unaffiliated, and by definition are at greater risk.

The recommendations are broken into five categories: realignment of resources; safer schools; police/enforcement; public health; and new initiatives.

### Realignment of Resources



#### >>Summer jobs and stipends

According to almost all discussions and community forums, summer jobs remain among the most sought after resources for young people.

Given that the number of eligible youth is at an all time high, more jobs are needed today than ever before. Further, current economic conditions have placed adults, parents and seniors in positions that would typically be held by youth.

Resources must be made immediately available to place additional youth in summer jobs. Violence among fourteen year-olds is

rapidly increasing, and necessitates their involvement in the program. Currently only ABCD has consistently offered jobs to fourteen year-old youth. Capacity exists within the ABCD program to immediately put young people to work when funds become available.

Furthermore, the city's announcement of summer jobs for 150 adjudicated youth was a good start. Hundreds more who are DSS, DYS, or court involved, and are at the greatest risk. Each year, approximately 3,000 students graduate from the Boston Public Schools, and roughly half that many drop out.<sup>8</sup> This population must not be overlooked when new resources are made available.

For some organizations, stipends serve as greater tools than summer jobs. Those organizations hire peer leaders to bring unaffiliated youth into their organizations. These peer leaders are natural leaders, that if left alone, may become gang affiliated. For some youth that were previously court involved, this is a means to re-engage and turn them around.

In 2005, Boston made available \$300,000 in direct stipends to community organizations. The city should again identify resources in order to provide stipends to those organizations that already have winning solutions.

#### >>Youth Services on Saturdays and Evenings

Since twenty-five percent of the shootings with victims twenty-one years and younger occurred on



Saturdays and in the evenings, the hours of Boston Community Centers, as well as other private community centers, should be reconfigured to better address the needs of the youth population they serve. Today only a fraction of these centers are open on Saturdays, and of those that are, a vast majority close early evening.

Opening centers alone will not result in increased attendance. In order to draw youth into community centers, programs will have to appeal to what interests young people. Students participating in the community forums said that they want to be included in deciding what programs take place. They also recognized the need for and appreciated supervised settings.

The city should partner with community based organizations that are better equipped to handle the seven day-a-week, 10AM to midnight wrap around service model that so many Boston youth now require. These settlement houses should service parts of our city where violence is at its highest.

Youth participants indicated an interest in programs including late night basketball, baseball and other sports programs. There are 41 parks across the city with capacity to illuminate evening activities. These parks should be opened late in areas where they would be most utilized. Again, supervision for these programs is essential to insure safe and productive activities.

Libraries, with the exception of Copley, are closed on Saturday. Libraries offer access to the Internet and alternative activities that may appeal to young people not reached

through traditional sports, and other activities. These libraries should be opened in strategic locations to gauge their success in drawing youth participants.

#### **>>Hire Additional Street Workers**

For many Boston youth, street workers serve as a meaningful adult connection to resources. During the nineties, there were 42 Street Workers employed by the city across several different agencies, today there are only twenty-four, despite record numbers of high school-aged youth. As such, they are overextended and unable to spend enough time in the communities they serve. Youth in one of the forums complained about having to “share” their street worker with another community. Boston must substantially increase the number of street workers in order to meet the growing population of youth.

In addition, the rising spike in girl violence and girl gangs is disturbing. The city has already begun planning programs to address this issue and should continue to do so.

#### **>>Transportation**

Transportation continued to surface as an issue for youth service providers. One provider said they spent \$10,000 a year on insurance for their vans alone.

Many youth said that they were afraid to ride the MBTA which can often serve as an unintended meeting place and become a catalyst for fights among youth from different neighborhoods.

The city runs 35 vans out of the Elderly Commission from the early

morning until 4:00PM, when they are returned to a parking lot and not used for the balance of the evening. These vans might serve as valuable resources for youth organizations that would otherwise be unable to afford the cost of transportation.



#### **>>Start high school later**

Since the majority of gun violence takes place when school is not in session, and minimal violence occurs in the immediate morning leading up to school, schools should begin later than their current 7:20AM start time. This would push the closing time later into the day, and would provide fewer hours of unsupervised activities.

### **Safer Schools**



#### **>>Increase sports and arts programs in schools**

Youth that participated in the forums and other discussions expressed massive frustration and boredom with the endless drilling and practice of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test and test preparation. Electives have been replaced with test preparation. After school programs teach MCAS preparation. Far too many students consistently describe their school experience as an MCAS-centric environment.

Art and physical education courses have been removed from the school setting. For the struggling student who doesn't find academic success, these electives can serve as valuable alternatives and offer a means of self-validation. Given the large number of annual dropouts (nearly half the number of students that graduate), as well as the pressure on teachers to improve scores, the incentive for students to remain in school is tenuous.

Most troubling, the achievement gap that exists among students of different races has yet to show significant signs of improvement under the MCAS system.

This is particularly achievable given that most high school students take public transportation, and not yellow school buses to school. (Special education students; however, do take BPS provided transportation, and as such the schedule would have to be reconfigured for participating schools).

Additionally, studies have shown that students that are more rested perform better.

The initiative is not without issues. Careful attention will have to be paid to rising truancy rates for those students who leave the home after their parent(s). The main cause of truancy; however is not "wanting to do other things," but rather, "oversleeping or being too tired."<sup>9</sup> Also, there are many students with after school activities or work plans that would interfere with a later dismissal time. Those students should be allowed to petition their school for early dismissal.

#### **>>130,000 college students**

Boston should be the first city in America that requires every college student to perform community service, particularly by assisting Boston youth. Currently it is estimated that less than

ten percent of college students volunteer in public schools.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, no municipality can require such an edict, but working with college and university presidents, Boston could and should lead the nation. Many schools already have centers for community service in place.

## Police/Enforcement



### >>Improve community relations and continue to make diversity a priority

A majority of participants in the community forums felt that most important thing the Boston Police Department could do was to improve relationships within the community through dialogues and interaction. Bringing police together with youth, particularly at-risk and adjudicated youth, along with their family would serve as an intervening tool to get to kids before they get into trouble.

Essential to any strategy in strengthening police and community relations is ensuring that the people who serve, reflect the citizens that they serve, in terms of diversity and their ability to communicate in their native language.



### >>Increase Staffing

As already referenced, there is a direct relationship between gun violence and police staffing. Placing more police on the street amid continued federal and state cuts is difficult, but necessary to continue reductions in violence.

In addition, BPD has capacity to work smarter and more efficiently by realigning detective staffing, and

increasing technology by tapping federal homeland security funds.

### >>Detective Shifts after Midnight

Detectives should be on duty between 7PM to 3AM. The majority of shifts end by 11:45PM. The first four hours of an investigation are crucial to solving a case. Since a significant proportion of shootings occur between the hours of 12:00AM and 3:00AM, Boston Police should ensure that there is detective coverage after midnight.

### >>Improve technology

The extended vacancy of a Chief Information Officer *within* Boston Police Department headquarters has jeopardized the cutting edge technology that once distinguished the department.

Boston should join cities like New York and Chicago by utilizing handheld wireless devices that eliminate the inefficient practice of returning to the police station to file paperwork, and effectively remove police from the street for significant portions of their shifts. Ideally, police should be able to file reports from the field therefore maintaining a secure, uninterrupted presence in the neighborhood.

The purchase of this technology by other cities' police departments has already been approved for federal homeland security funds.

### >>Prosecution/Court Issues

A recent report analyzing 2005 firearm related arrests reported that of the 597 persons who were arrested for unlawful possession of a firearm, one third of whom had two or more firearm possession cases, only 60

percent were *in custody* as of January 2006.<sup>11</sup>

Federal prosecutions comprised only a fraction of those cases, less than one percent. Federal laws offer greater flexibility for prosecutors with stronger penalties including a greater number of available statutes, more available rules of law and procedures, and other tools that are currently not available under state law. State lawmakers should expand state law to include some of the tools that focus on the most egregious perpetrators of violence and that will serve as deterrents for others.

## Public Health



### >>Trauma Training

The Boston Public Health Commission (PHC) has planned for the trauma training of street workers. This training is essential to their work, and must continue to take place, sooner rather than later. Training should also be expanded to include teachers.

### >>Industry Protocols

PHC has also begun organizing hospitals to implement protocols for victims of gun violence. Just as no hospital would knowingly release a patient thought to be suicidal, a hospital should not release a victim of gun violence who demonstrates signs of trauma without referring that person to services. Some hospitals have already initiated protocols in both emergency *and* non-emergency settings to screen for these issues.

## New Initiatives

### >>Increase Summer Nights for Youth at City Hall Plaza

Young people, just like everyone else, are looking for something exciting to do and to make them feel valued. Participants in the community forums enjoyed past hip-hop concerts and talent shows on City Hall Plaza and wanted to do more.

### >>Televised Talent Shows

Boston once had a television show called *Community Auditions* that televised area youth competing against each other for prizes and fame. Over the years, Boston saw its share of musicians discovered as a result of that show. Imagine the number of youth that would take themselves off the street *on their own* if given an opportunity to compete in such a setting. Boston is a major media market and could use some assistance from its television networks to work with our young people in such a manner.

### >>Safe Place Initiative

No young person should feel that they cannot walk into a police station, fire station, community center or library if they feel they are in trouble. Within each of these places, a responsible adult should be available to contact someone (such as a youth worker or a parent) to assist the youth. Basic fundamental training and protocols could be provided fairly easily.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The majority of the above recommendations require the resources of the City of Boston. With the budgetary challenges outlined above, it is impossible for all of these items to be funded. The City Council must work with the administration to fund and prioritize those initiatives that make the greatest impact. Indeed; much of this has already been occurring. Currently, the council is in the process of reviewing the administration's fiscal year 2007 proposed budget. It contains many of the resources that will accomplish some of the above recommendations. Citizen participation is also essential to this process. The Ways and Means Committee hearings that have taken place to date as well as those hearings and forums held by the Special Committee on Youth Violent Crime Prevention have allowed for significant input in this area.

This is not an academic exercise, but rather a crisis in need of solutions. The challenges facing our youth today are severe and require more than our budget can deliver. The current demographics of high school aged youth require immediate attention. While this is an immediate problem, it is also one that we will move past in approximately two to three years. Because of this, many of the above recommendations are a one time, and not a recurring cost. **Therefore, budgetary reserves should be made available as part of the fiscal year 2007, 2008 and 2009 budgets to handle the spike in at-risk youth.** The following table

attempts to quantify the number of youth above the more manageable figures of calendar year 2009.

Year	Fiscal Year	No. of Youth*	Dif. from 2009
2006	2007	26,087	+2,673
2007	2008	25,688	+2,274
2008	2009	24,714	+1,300
2009	2010	23,414	0

\*High school aged youth

There are a myriad of possible funding combinations. Summer jobs, stipends and expanding youth serving resources are all prime candidates for funding using budgetary reserves. For example, providing an additional 1,000 summer jobs at an average cost of \$1,200 per position would cost \$1.2 million. Exactly how much is funded to handle the spike in youth population needs to be determined for the short term and over a three year period.

Many of the above recommendations require significant resources in order to bring them to fruition. Others have minimal costs associated with them. Some of these recommendations require the work of government while others require the work of us all.

Throughout the neighborhoods of Boston citizens are actively working to make their communities safe. Residents and business owners have joined together in Chinatown to launch safety patrols with strong results. A group of teenagers in Jamaica Plain, frustrated with the increase in violence, opened and

continue to operate their own youth center. In another part of the city a resident removes gang related graffiti from public property on his own time using his own resources. Recently a group of Jamaica Plain residents began meeting with each other regularly to foster community and stamp out violence. Across the city, crime watches pull residents together around a common cause. These are

but a fraction of examples that regular citizens have offered to make Boston a safer city, and should serve as a catalyst for us all.

Ultimately if Boston is going to repeat the success it has had in the past, it will once again have to pull together and create, not another miracle, but a lasting plan for peace.

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- <sup>1</sup> Difference between 2005 and 1995, Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Relations
- <sup>2</sup> Difference between 2005 and 1996, Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Relations
- <sup>3</sup> Difference between fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2007, Boston Jobs and Community Services
- <sup>4</sup> Loss of US Department of Labor Funds, Boston Jobs and Community Services
- <sup>5</sup> Difference between 2005 and present, Boston Jobs and Community Services
- <sup>6</sup> Excluding Boston Adult Tech. and Boston Evening Academy
- <sup>7</sup> Report of the 2004 Boston Youth Survey, Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center, August 2005.
- <sup>8</sup> Too Big to be Seen: The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America, May 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> Report of the 2004 Boston Youth Survey, Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center, August 2005.
- <sup>10</sup> Informal estimate from Ways and Means hearing testimony for BPS, May, 2006.
- <sup>11</sup> 2005 Firearm Arrestee Review Project, BPD, as of January 19, 2006.